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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0355/01 0380626
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 070626Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5606
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 000355

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FOR USAID/ANE/IR
NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2018
TAGS: [PARM](#) [PGOG](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: JANUARY 2008 UPDATE ON IRAQ'S INTERNALLY DISPLACED
PERSONS AND RETURNEES

REF: A. BAGHDAD 02737
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 03678
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 03885

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Patricia A. Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The latest reports on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from the United Nations (U.N.) Cluster F and Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) show an increase in the number of IDPs in the past 3 months. This increase likely reflects a lag in data processing and a spike in registration of previous displacements rather than significant new displacement. Recent IDP and refugee returns have received considerable press coverage, but the number of returnees is minute in comparison to the 2.2 million who remain displaced (one million before February 2006 and 1.2 million displaced after that date according to the U.N.). Two Government of Iraq (GoI) plans to assist returns are unclear. A new United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) 3-month pilot return project will assist 5,000 families. To date, GoI efforts to support IDPs have been disorganized and lacking clear leadership. The USG through USAID has provided over \$228 million USD to Iraq in support of vulnerable populations since 2003 through five implementing partners.
END SUMMARY.

U.N. and MoDM Reports Show Slight Increases in Iraqi IDPs

[1](#)2. (C) The U.S. Mission views the UN Cluster F IDP reporting as the most reliable data available in Iraq. Cluster F draws on data provided by International Organization for Migration (IOM), and UN agencies as well as data from MoDM. MoDM only counts GOI registered IDPs. Since IDP registrations in Baghdad were halted in September, MoDM numbers are considered under-reported. In 2007 the U.N. reported 198,428 families were displaced in Iraq between February 2006 and November [1](#)2007. This is an increase of 24,447 families (or 149,824 individuals) since the last report was released in September [1](#)2007. The UN data on Baghdad indicates 59,346 IDP families (30 percent of all displaced Iraqis) have been displaced since February 2006 and that there are more IDPs in Baghdad than any other province. A MoDM report released 21 November 2007 stated there are 163,574 IDP families in Iraq, up from 151,350 families reported the previous month. 57,808 families (or 355,889 individuals) are currently located in Baghdad. UN reporting supports this. The MoDM report indicates that most of the new registrations since the last report occurred in the provinces of Diyala, Baghdad and Karbala.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: An increase in the number of IDPs does not necessarily reflect only recent displacement. In Baghdad,

the increase of registered IDPs is probably a function of several factors, including some new displacement; improved data processing by the MoDM Karkh and Rusafa branch offices; and the announcement of several assistance programs for registered IDPs. The potential for obtaining assistance likely prompted some previously unregistered IDPs to register. End comment.

Iraqi Red Crescent Society Shows a Decrease in IDP's

¶4. (C) The Iraqi Red Crescent (IRC) IDP numbers are significantly higher (by 117,000 families) than those reported by the UN and MODM. The IRC report dated 27 December 2007 states that there were 344,236 IDP families as of the end of November 2007. Interagency analysis concludes that the main reason IRC counts are higher is that counting methodology changed in August 2007 to include IDPs displaced prior to February 2006. The UN and MODM do not include pre-February 2006 displaced populations in their current reporting numbers. IRC maintains that their numbers are not inclusive of pre-February 2006 displacements and are reflective of post displaced populations only. We will continue to monitor this to bring clarity to the discrepancy in reporting numbers.

Baghdad IDPs and Returnees

¶5. (C) MoDM data, press reports, and local contacts indicate an increasing number of IDP returns to Baghdad. An MoDM memo dated 13 December 2007 reports that 3,653 families have

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returned. Of that total, about one-half returned to West Baghdad and the balance to East Baghdad since January 2007. There are 4,502 families in the process of completing paperwork to document their return to various parts of the country and most of that total (3,455) will return to Baghdad.

GoI Introduces Two Plans to Address Returns

¶6. (C) There are currently two GoI-led plans to facilitate IDP and refugee returns, but neither plan has been coordinated with Iraqi, Coalition, or civil society (Non-Governmental Organization) stakeholders. Both plans are unclear in terms of practical implementation.

¶7. (C) Abd Al-Samd Rahman Sultan, Minister of Displacement and Migration, presented his ministry's returns plan in November. That plan is more a set of guiding principles than clear action items. The plan calls for voluntary returns, coordination, and rehabilitation of property, reintegration, and protection. MoDM says this plan will be used as a blueprint to facilitate and support returns. However, the plan fails to address essential issues such as evicting squatters and security for returnees. The plan mentions that "various entities" should coordinate efforts to provide assistance to returnees, to include helping them find jobs and repairing their homes, without saying which entities should coordinate, and how or where resources will be made available. Under this plan, the GoI is supposed to repair private and government property to accommodate returnees. The plan does not articulate who will carry out repairs or who will decide which properties are repaired and in which order of priority. The plan indicates that returnees should be afforded protection but provides no details on the proposed role of Iraqi and Coalition Forces, the courts and other GoI entities.

¶18. (C) On 9 December, General Aboud Qanbar, Commanding General of the Baghdad Operations Command (BOC), presented a six point plan to facilitate the returns of IDPs and refugees to Baghdad. In Baghdad the BOC commands the Iraqi army and National police and has an essential role in planning for returnees. The BOC plan includes roles for MoDM, the Baghdad Provincial Council, and Coalition Forces, none of whom were consulted before the plan was released. The initiative would use media campaigns to publicize locations for returnees to settle and would identify returnees, which could endanger these individuals. MoDM officials have said they do not concur with the BOC plan.

¶19. (C) The BOC plan includes the following points: 1) The BOC, in coordination with MNF-I, will identify areas safe for returns. This information will be provided to the Baghdad Provincial Council (BPC) and MoDM, which will use the media to invite displaced families to return to those areas; 2) displaced citizens will register with the MoDM and indicate their desire to return to their homes; 3) MoDM will provide the BOC with the names and addresses of those who wish to return; 4) the BOC, in coordination with MNF-I, will inspect homes of potential returnees to determine if they are habitable; 5) MoDM and BPC, in coordination with the BOC and MNF-I, will announce the names of those citizens approved to return to their homes and provide a timetable for doing so; 6) the media will publicize returns and all administrative and security details will be coordinated among the BOC, the BPC, and MoDM. Comment: IDP population breakout is approximately 63% Shia Muslim; 30% Sunni Muslim; 5% Christian and 2% Other.

¶10. (C) Comment: The plan does not lay out standards for how areas will be determined "safe". Publicizing returns could encourage attacks on returnees. Most Sunni IDPs who have not already registered are reluctant to do so because they do not want to provide their personal information to the predominantly Shia Government or because the process is too time consuming. Many Sunnis will be reluctant to advise MoDM that they want to return to their homes amid growing suspicion that the GoI is only interested in promoting Shia returns. Finally, the plan states returnees should await permission to return to their homes, although Iraqi officials acknowledge that IDPs should be allowed to return on their own timetable. None of the plans deal with potentially explosive issues such as evicting squatters, the possibility

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of renewed sectarian tension as now homogeneous neighborhoods attempt to reintegrate multiple sects, compensation for damaged or destroyed property, competing property claims, and increased demand for already strained services. End Comment.

UN Introduces Rapid Response Plan and SRSB staffing

¶11. (C) UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have developed a rapid response plan for returnees that will target the most vulnerable returnees while improving registration and needs assessment mechanisms. The \$11 million dollar plan is a 3-month pilot project that will be limited to providing immediate assistance to just 5,000 returnee families. The U.N. plans on issuing an appeal for \$200 million dollars in funding in February 2008 to continue the program beyond the 3 month pilot period.

¶12. (C) We have supported the SRSB efforts to increase UN staffing based in Iraq, in part to address the IDP/Refugee/Returnee issues. This plan on returnees is a positive step. However, the U.N. does not currently have sufficient local or international staff on the ground to effectively oversee a large-scale returnee program. We are

encouraged by recent dialogue with the U.N. that they will seek to increase staff in Iraq in the near future. The UN appeal will seek additional resources from the USG to fund the same activities USAID currently funds.

USG Efforts

¶13. (C) Since 2003, USAID has provided over \$228 million USD to Iraq in support of vulnerable populations. USAID/OFDA continues to provide humanitarian relief and assistance to IDPs and returnees through its five implementing partners: International Organization for Migration, International Medical Corps, Mercy Corps, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development, and International Relief and Development. USAID leads the interagency effort in Iraq on vulnerable populations. A draft strategy to assist Iraq to respond to on-going displacement challenges is in the process. Since December, the interagency team as well as partners and international organizations have engaged MoDM to strengthen their ability to address the current challenges.

MoDM Needs A Mandate and Resources

¶14. (C) The MODM has never received clear authority to direct GOI IDP policy, nor the resources. In November 2007, Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus wrote Prime Minister Maliki urging the GoI to adopt a unified, government-led approach to address challenges posed by IDPs and returnees. In the absence of legislation, an Executive Order (EO) was drafted by the National Security Advisor and MODM for the Prime Minister's signature to address the Crocker/Petraeus letter. However, there is progress on both the legislative and policy fronts. The Basic Law will establish MODM as the ministry responsible for addressing and providing services to IDPs and Refugees in Iraq. On January 22, 2008 the Council of Ministers (CoM) approved the law and it is now with the Council of Representatives (COR) for the first of three readings. We anticipate that this process will take several months. The National Policy which defines the day to day operations of MODM has been drafted by MODM with assistance from UNHCR. The National Policy has gone through several re-drafts and is currently back with MODM. Until the Basic Law and the National Policy are approved, the EO (once signed) will be the document that provides the framework and mandate for MODM.

¶15. (C) The GOI must substantially increase MoDM's 2008 budget to enable it to increase administrative capacity and offer compensation to service ministries, NGO's and private companies that implement its plans, policies and projects. MoDM's 2007 budget was only \$6 million despite the ministry's significant responsibilities and there is no clarity on the 2008 budget

Disorganized Response

¶16. (C) GoI efforts to assist IDPs and returnees have been disorganized, reactive, and plagued by administrative shortcomings and allegations of corruption. Rather than

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encouraging a unified MoDM-led effort to address the considerable challenges posed by IDPs, the GoI has allowed other entities such as Dr. Ahmed Chalabi's Services Committee and the BOC create committees and weigh in on IDPs/Returnee issues in an ad hoc manner. While providing limited resources to MoDM in 2007, the GOI has provided the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (another group that wants to be in the lead on IDPs) with about \$60 million in 2007. The U.S. initiative to build MoDM capacity (funded by the State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and

implemented by IOM) ended in December 2007. IOM provided technical training in IDP registrations for MODM, development of software to register IDPs, and infrastructure support to MODM branch offices. The results of that initiative are still being assessed. To strengthen the skills of MODM's civil service corps, USAID's Tatweer program will develop a capacity building program in coordination with MODM leadership. The first meeting between MODM and Tatweer will take place in early February 2008.

GOI Funding Support to IDPs

¶17. (C) GoI initiatives to provide monetary support to IDPs have been disorganized. In October 2006, a first initiative of one-time payments of 100,000 Iraqi Dinar (about \$80.00 USD) was planned for 15,000 displaced families in Baghdad. In the past year, less than 10,000 families received payments.

¶18. (C) In the spring of 2007, a second initiative to make one-time payments of one million Iraqi Dinars (about \$800.00 USD) for displaced families who return to their homes in Baghdad was launched. Funding for 5,000 returning families was provided by the COM and distributed through the Governor's office in cooperation with the BPC and MoDM. However, only 4,000 families (mostly Shia) received this payment. Baghdad Governor Hussein Ali Tahan has reportedly announced that the rest of the payments in this allocation will go to Sunni families. Payments have been halted for about 3 months due to allegations of corruption. It remains unclear if the COM will allocate more funds to provide payments to displaced families returning to Baghdad.

¶19. (C) The third initiative is a 6-month temporary salary of 150,000 Iraqi Dinars per month (for a total of 900,000 Iraqi dinars, or about USD 735) for about 140,000 IDP families who registered their displacement between March 2006 and July 1, ¶2007. MoDM states 56,000 Baghdad families will receive the salary in three lump sums. The first payment is still being distributed. MoDM officials say they are not sure when the second and third payments will be made.

Next Steps

¶20. (C) There are encouraging developments these past two weeks that the GOI is now focused on addressing IDP, Refugee and Returnee legislative and policy priorities. We will continue dialogue with the GOI at all levels to advance gains that have been made. Strengthening MoDM to address the challenges ahead will remain a priority. Finally, as security improves in Baghdad, monitoring of neighborhoods to assess services where large populations of IDPs are located will need to be addressed.

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